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CAPONS AND CAPONIZING

BY

C. M. BICE, Poultry Husbandman

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CAPONS AND CAPONIZING

By C. M. Bice, *Poultry Husbandman*

Introduction

The art of caponizing is not new for it was practiced by the Chinese more than 2,000 years. S. K. Burdin (1, 7) states that as early as the year 1,000 A.D. capons were mentioned in the literature and history of Europe. Very little caponizing was done in North America before 1875. The progress made in America was rather slow, due no doubt to the instruments used for the operation. Our improved modern instruments, such as are shown in figure 1, have caused a revival of the practice of caponizing with the results that today the average operator realizes less than 5 per cent "slips." There is considerable interest in Hawaii in the art of caponizing, with the result that many are now caponizing their surplus cockerels of the meat and dual purpose breeds. This circular is intended to give beginners, or prospective beginners, in a very simple manner, the information necessary for successful caponizing and also to encourage greater production of capons.

Characteristics of a Capon

A capon is a male from which the reproductive organs have been removed. He differs from ordinary cockerels in that the comb and wattles remain small; the saddle and hackle feathers grow abundantly; the fighting disposition is entirely lost and a sluggish appearance is very characteristic. (Frontispiece.) Quite often he takes on maternal characteristics and may be taught to take care of a brood of chicks. Owing to his large size, he may be safely given 25 chicks to brood. He is attentive to the brood, watching over it with more concern than does a hen.

Advantages of Caponizing

There are many advantages to be gained by caponizing the surplus cockerels. A decided increase in growth and weight; a quiet, sluggish temperament permits large numbers to be run together in the same yard; sweeter and finer texture of meat and lower cost of production, are a few advantages of the capon over

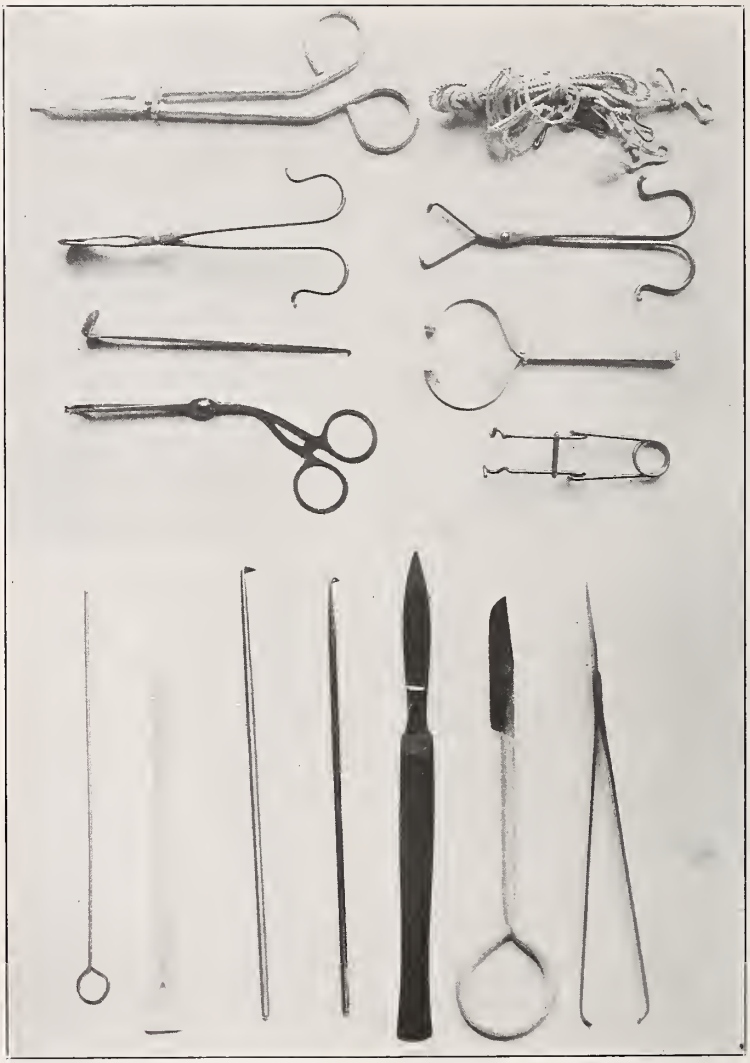

Figure 1—Three sets of instruments: upper left, removers; upper right, spreaders; below, knives and probes.

the cockerel. In addition to these advantages, a higher price is usually paid for capons than for cockerels.

Breeds Best Suited for Caponizing

Cockerels of the dual purpose and meat breeds are preferred for caponizing, as they are large and develop into larger capons (figure 2). Capons are sold by weight, consequently birds of the larger breeds will bring better prices than the smaller birds of the egg-type breeds. Breeds best suited for the production of capons are Plymouth Rocks, Rhode Island Reds, Jersey Black

Figure 2—A dual purpose breed suitable for capons (young cockerels).

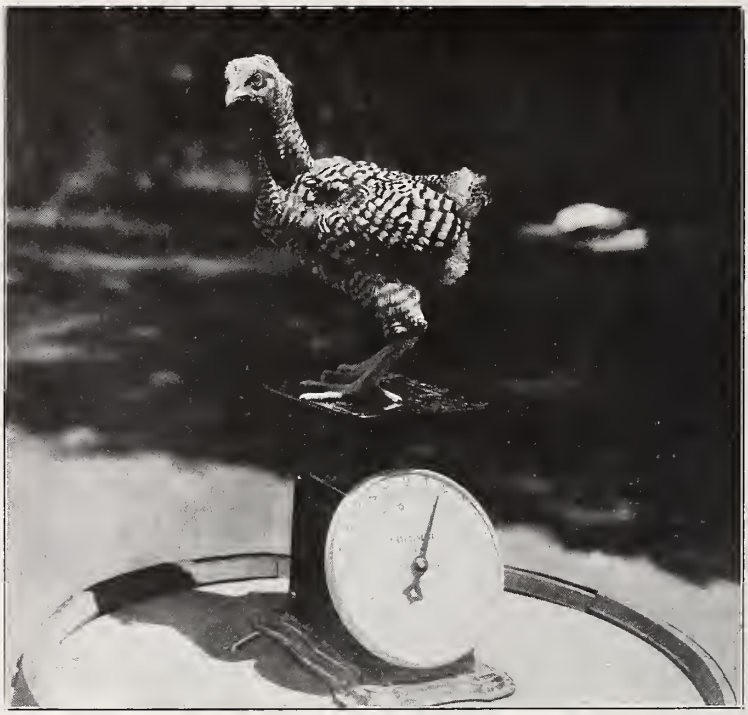

Figure 3—Determining weight to caponize (cockerel).

Giants, Japanese Games, Brahmas, Wyandottes, Australorps and Cochins. Excellent crosses may be made by mating the Japanese Game with any of the breeds mentioned above.

Age at Which to Caponize

The age at which a young cockerel is caponized has a direct bearing on the success of the operation. For best results, cockerels weighing from 1½ to 2 pounds are preferred (figure 3). The proper time is just when the comb shows signs of developing; at this time the testicles are small and may be removed more successfully. With older cockerels the chances for "slips" increase. A "slip" is a cockerel from which the sexual organs have not been entirely removed, and masculine characteristics develop as in the ordinary cockerel, but for which reproduction is usually impossible.

Method of Operation

If it is possible, operate on a bright sunny day. With a little practice artificial light may be substituted for the direct sunlight; however, for the beginner, the direct sunlight is preferred. Before a cockerel is operated upon, he should have been starved and given no water for from 24 to 36 hours. This will insure empty intestines, thus permitting the testicles to be readily seen through the opening. Be sure to mark the bird to be caponized with a permanent mark. A slit in the web of the foot, or the removal of the center toe nail, are suggested means of marking the capons. Sealed leg bands may also be used effectively.

Holding the Bird. A barrel makes a cheap and satisfactory operating table (figure 4). A caponizing board (figure 5) may also be used to hold the bird in position for the operation. If a barrel is used, let the weights drop down on the inside so as to be out of the way of the operator (figure 4). If two men are available, one may hold the bird in position while the other performs the operation. The main object in holding the bird in place is to stretch the bird so that the skin over the area in which the cut is to be made is rather tight. The legs and wings should be tied firmly either to the side of the operating board or to weights if a barrel is used (figures 4 and 5).

Figure 4—Barrel with weight on inside held by cord passing through holes in top of barrel.

Figure 5—Caponizing board, showing bird tied in place.

Instruments for the Operation. In figure 1 three different types of instruments are shown. Each manufacturer claims points of superiority for his set. Regardless of the set used, experience in using it will enable the operator to work swiftly and accurately. The instruments should be disinfected before using. A few drops of carbolic acid or creolin in a dish of water will serve the purpose. A small amount of absorbent cotton may be necessary in case the bird should bleed freely.

Detailed Steps in the Operation. (1) Remove the feathers from the area about the last ribs, directly in front of the hip bone on the left side.

(2) Hold the knife in hand, the blade extending about one-half inch below the middle finger.

(3) Locate the last two ribs by pressing the fingers between the hip and ribs. The end of the hook needle may also be used to locate the last rib by rubbing it over the ribs beginning near the center of the body of the bird (figure 6).

(4) Draw the skin back over the hip bone and make an incision between the last two ribs by firmly pressing the knife through the skin until it touches the finger holding the knife.

(5) Make the incision about ¾ to 1 inch in length. Do not remove the left hand that is stretching the skin back toward the hips until the spreader is placed into the incision. If bleeding occurs, wipe blood with absorbent cotton.

(6) Insert spreaders with care, spreaders pointing over the back of bird (figure 7).

Figure 6—Making incision between last two ribs.

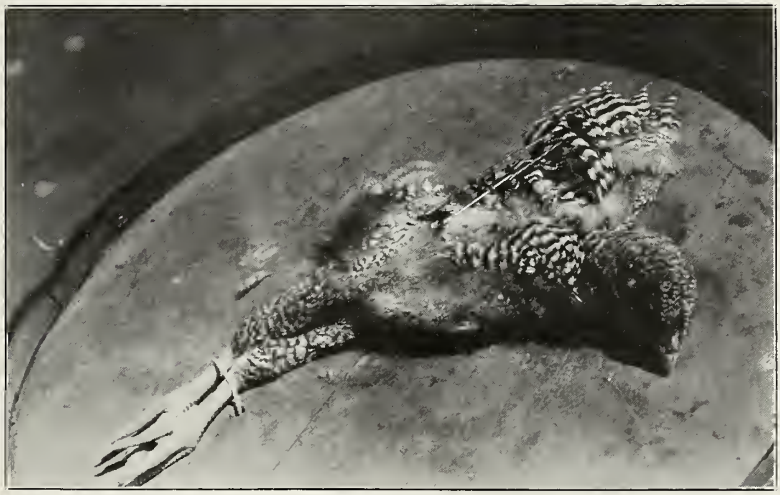

Figure 7—Spreaders in place, pointing over bird's back, hole visible.

(7) Work from in front of bird. Tear away membrane with hook. Do not puncture intestines while tearing membrane. Organ is now in view.

(8) Testicles appear about the size of a small pea and are yellowish in color.

(9) Insert the remover with care, work slowly and carefully. Grasp the testicle lightly at first so as to be sure the artery is not grasped.

(10) When sure of securing the testicle only, grasp it securely and remove the organ by gently pulling it directly to the opening (figure 8).

(11) Remove the spreaders and turn bird over on other side to remove the right testicle.

(12) In removing the right testicle, repeat the operation as done on the left side.

(13) If both organs are removed from one side, the right side should be used. Remove left organ first. Inexperienced operator should operate from two sides rather than from only one.

(14) Remove bird from operating board or barrel.

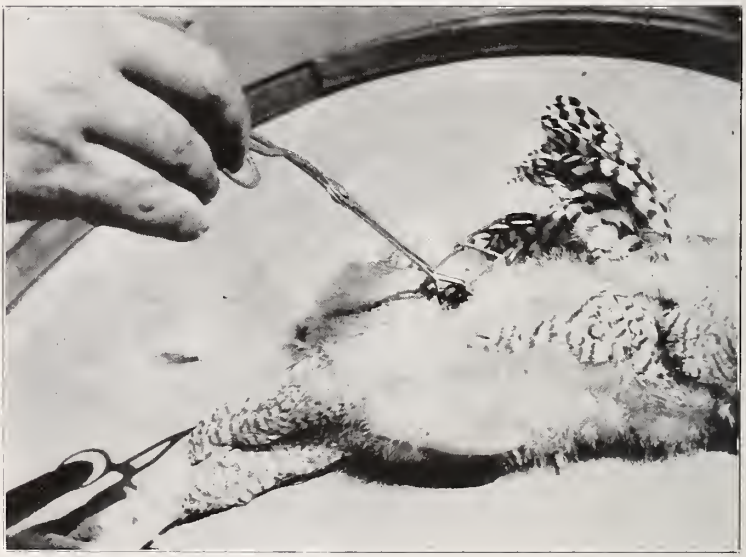

Figure 8—Removing testicle with remover.

Figure 9—Rhode Island Red capon.
(Courtesy Kalakaua Intermediate School)

Care of Birds After the Operation

Place the birds in a house or a yard by themselves where no roosting quarters are available. It is a good practice to have the capons remain on the floor for a week or so after the operation. If roosts are used, they should be placed near the floor. For the first day after the operation give a wet mash and either milk or water to drink. Provide shade and protection in the yards. After the second day the usual ration may be satisfactorily fed until fattening time.

On the day after the operation and for a period of about one week the birds should be watched carefully every day for "wind puffs." Wind puffs are caused by air getting in underneath the skin and puffing out the skin around the area of the incision. This can be remedied by puncturing the skin in two places with a sharp-pointed knife. Press the air out of the cavity and release the bird. It takes from 10 to 14 days for the incision to heal.

Feeding Capons

Capons require from 10 to 12 months to develop into marketable birds. This means that during this period a ration fed primarily for growth must be used. A large frame is required on a capon in order that the weight which is desired in good capons may be obtained. Build the frame first, then put the meat and fat on later. For the fattening of capons for market, see Circular No. 4, issued by this station. Figure 9 shows a Rhode Island Red capon just before being dressed for market.

Killing and Dressing Capons

After the capons have been fattened, they should be starved for 24 hours before killing. The preferred method of killing is the stick method, which consists of severing the jugular vein with a sharp, narrow-bladed knife through the mouth. The knife is then thrust through the roof of the mouth into the brain. If a satisfactory stick is made the bird usually squawks. The bird is then ready for dry picking and the feathers are easily removed (figure 10).

Only dry picking should be practiced as birds picked by this method present a neater appearance, and also because feathers are left on certain portions of the bird, usually on the hackle and head, the tail, on the last two joints of the wings, and on the leg from the hock joint to about one-third the length of the distance between the hock joint and hip. This characteristic manner of picking makes it possible to distinguish a capon from other classes of poultry. In picking capons, one should strive to secure a bird that appeals to the consumer; in other words, one that is free from torn skin and bruises.

Marketing Capons

A producer of capons should endeavor to build up a private trade with hotels, restaurants, private homes, shipping companies, and high-class markets. In this way he will receive premiums for a quality product that brings prices exceeding the market quotations on cockerels or roosters. It is not worth the effort to produce capons if the price is not above that of ordinary market poultry.

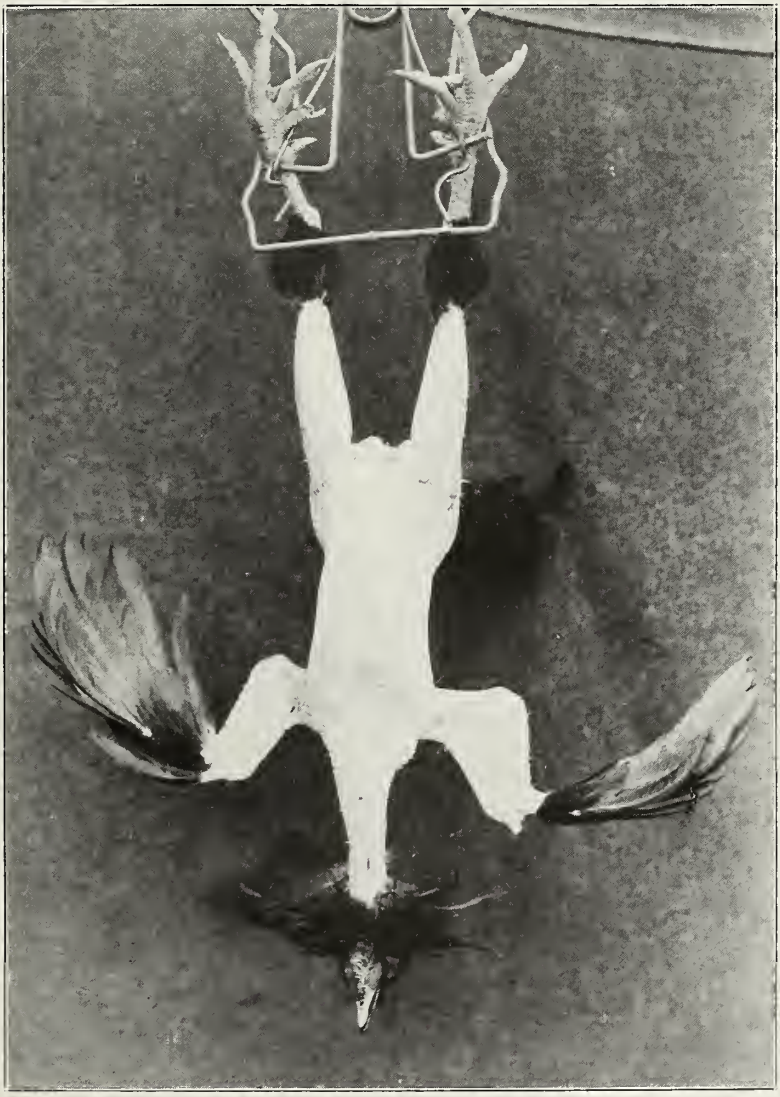

Figure 10—Same bird as Figure 9 dressed for market.

Capon Prices in Honolulu for Past Five Years

The range in wholesale prices per pound for capons (live weight) in Honolulu the past five years is shown in table 1.

TABLE 1—*Range in wholesale prices for capons in Honolulu, 1927 to 1931 (live weight)*

Year	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931
Price per pound (cents)	.70-.75	.....	.60-.70	.....	.50-.80

Because of the limited number of capons marketed each year, it is quite difficult to obtain accurate figures. However, the figures quoted in table 1 are fairly accurate and will serve as a guide in the production of capons. The high figure of 80 cents per pound for 1931 was during the winter months in which national holidays occurred. During the summer months the lower prices prevailed.

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(1) BURDIN, S. K.—Safe Capon Guide, 32 pp., illus., 1926.